

## 2 *The Knights*



The complaints with which this play opens are uttered in a dialogue between two servants. The soliloquies with which the *Clouds* and the *Acharnians* begin are uttered by the men who initiate the action of these plays. Can we infer from this that the action of the *Knights* requires for its initiation the co-operation of the two servants whom we hear at the beginning? Those servants are in fact the generals Demosthenes and Nikias, and their master is Demos. Demos has recently bought another slave, the Paphlagonian, in fact Kleon, who within a very short time has acquired full power over the other slaves and indeed over Demos' whole household. This intruder and upstart makes life for Demosthenes and Nikias utterly miserable. They curse him and lament their fate. Yet the active and manly Demosthenes soon gets tired of moaning and crying and suggests that they look out for something that will put an end to their tribulations. But no saving thought occurs to either of them; Nikias lacks the daring, and Demosthenes still lacks the inspiration. Although he is helpless for the time being, Demosthenes is not so helpless as to be unable to persuade Nikias to bring forth a proposal. Nikias in his fright so arranges things that Demosthenes is the one who pronounces Nikias' dangerous proposal that they desert to the enemy (for we are in the midst of the war). One could also say that Nikias brings forth in a cowardly, sophisticated, Euripidean manner the cowardly proposal that they should desert. Demosthenes rejects it, not because it is cowardly, but because he does not like Euripides and, above all, because the proposal is too risky for their skins. Thereupon Nikias proposes that they prostrate themselves before the image of some god. Demosthenes is amazed to find that Nikias truly believes in gods and asks him for some proof of the existence of gods. Nikias is convinced of the existence of gods by the fact that he is hated by the gods, Demosthenes admits that Nikias has a point but, as he shows by

deed, he does not think that prostration before the image of some god would do them any good: If the gods hate Nikias, Nikias and his comrades can not reasonably hope to be helped by the gods; they must look for help elsewhere. Demosthenes proposes that they should explain their predicament to the spectators; as far as the spectators are concerned, there is at least some hope that they do not hate the two fellow slaves. Nikias, realizing that the spectators might be no less pleased by his and Demosthenes' troubles than are the gods, agrees. By explaining to the audience the situation as it exists prior to the action of the play, Demosthenes acts in effect as the spokesman for the poet (cf. 228, 233): Demosthenes is more of an orator, more fertile in clever conceits than Nikias.

According to Demosthenes, their master Demos is an ill-tempered, half-deaf old man, and the recently bought Paphlagonian is a most malicious rogue who flatters and bribes the master most cleverly and successfully with exclusive regard to his own benefit. He does not permit any other slave to come near the master; he thus can deprive his fellow slaves of their rewards: He usurped the glory of Demosthenes' great victory over the Spartans at Pylos; he calumniates to the master his fellow slaves, who are punished severely and degradingly at his bidding. One of the devices by which Kleon rules Demos is to make the master mad and stupid by oracles. While Demosthenes is far from being pleased with Demos, he hates Kleon: The punishments that Demos inflicts are considerably lighter than the punishments with which Kleon threatens.

By addressing the audience, Demosthenes may have succeeded in winning its sympathy, and this would not be a small success; but he knows that he can not expect to receive advice from the audience. He therefore repeats his exhortation to Nikias that they deliberate which way and toward whom to turn. Nikias can not do better than to repeat his proposal that they desert. Demosthenes repeats his refutation of this proposal by going into details: Like Zeus, for example (cf. *Wasps* 620), Kleon oversees or watches everything; they could not escape him and his punishments. Nikias does not repeat his second proposal, the proposal that they turn to the gods; he now proposes that they die. Demosthenes is willing to die, provided they do it in a most manly manner. Nikias proposes that they follow the model of the most manly Themistokles, who committed suicide by drinking the blood of a bull. When he hears of drinking, Demosthenes takes hope; he is willing to drink, not indeed bull's blood, but unmixed wine: He transforms the means for dying into a means for living; by drinking wine he might become inspired and thus discover a way out. The sober

Nikias can not believe that drunkenness is conducive to sound deliberation. It is much more difficult for Demosthenes to convince Nikias of the virtues of wine-drinking than to persuade him to steal some wine for him while the Paphlagonian is asleep through drink. Having had his fill of excellent wine, Demosthenes has his inspiration; the plan that occurs to him is not his but the spirit's; the wine inspires him to consult the oracles with which Kleon holds Demos enthralled. At his command Nikias steals these oracles from the sleeping Kleon; improving on Demosthenes' command he brings him that holy oracle which Kleon guards with the greatest care. Demosthenes reads the oracle while continuing to drink. He soon discovers that the oracle points the way to Kleon's destruction. Acting on the advice conveyed by the oracle, Demosthenes will destroy Kleon's power.

It appears then that the action of the *Knights* could not have been initiated without the co-operation of Demosthenes and Nikias. To say the least, without the suggestive presence of Nikias' piety (his belief in oracles), Demosthenes would not have been inspired with the thought of exploiting the belief in oracles for the liberation of Athens. This is not to deny that the agreement (such as it is) between Demosthenes and Nikias regarding the use of the oracle could not have been achieved except through Demosthenes' becoming drunk: The sober Demosthenes could not have reached an agreement with the sober Nikias.<sup>10</sup> Demosthenes' decision to drink wine and thus to bring his thought or life to its highest pitch in its turn takes the place of Nikias' proposal that they destroy their lives; this proposal in its turn takes the place of Nikias' earlier proposal that they turn to the gods—a proposal that Demosthenes had rejected because he doubted the existence of the gods. It is the same Nikias who believes that the gods exist on the ground that they hate him and who proposes suicide as a way out of an apparently hopeless situation; since the gods hate him, he can not, like Dikaiopolis, love his life, his soul (*Acharnians* 357). The connection between these two proposals of Nikias throws light, if insufficient light, on the darkest occurrence in the *Clouds*. We recall that Socrates puts a sudden and unexplained stop to his instruction of Strepsiades when this pupil had just proposed to commit suicide in order to get out of an apparently hopeless situation; it appeared that Strepsiades could not have made that proposal unless he had forgotten a lesson given to him by Socrates during the indoor instruction (see above, pp. 26–27). Could suicide be the consequence of the belief in gods as beings necessarily inimical to man? For regardless of whether gods are the work of man's fear or of his love of beauty—of his longing for never-aging and never-perishing think-

ing beings of indescribable splendor—they impair man's self-esteem. Certain it is that while Nikias proposes, prior to Demosthenes' address to the audience, first that they desert and then that they turn to the gods, after that address he proposes first that they desert and then that they commit suicide: He replaces turning to the gods by suicide, or he treats turning to the gods and suicide as interchangeable. But let us return to Kleon's oracle.

If we can trust Demosthenes—for we do not hear the full text of the oracle—the oracle speaks of four men who rule Athens in succession. All four men are sellers of something. The order seems to be one of descent or degradation. The leather seller Kleon is the third. He will be driven out and replaced by a sausage seller. The sausage seller will be the last seller to rule Athens: Can we hope that with the expulsion of Kleon and the short-lived rule of the sausage seller, the nonsellers, i.e., the gentlemen, will again rule Athens, i.e., that the golden age that preceded the age of the sellers' rule will return? Be this as it may, like punitive Zeus, Kleon is the third in a series of rulers, and like Zeus he lives in fear of his possible successor (Aeschylus *Prometheus* 957–59). Or, as even the austere Thucydides seems to hint, Kleon is the comical equivalent of Perikles. The pious and inactive Nikias draws at once this despondent conclusion: Where can we find that sausage seller whom the oracle meant? Demosthenes replies: We must seek him. This unbelieving man does not know that the oracle makes it unnecessary for them to do any seeking: A sausage seller just passes by as if by divine ordination. What is still more marvelous, the sausage seller who suddenly appears at exactly the right moment will prove to be the very sausage seller who succeeds in ousting Kleon. The two generals call him to them so that he can hear of the bliss in store for him. Since someone has to go into the house in order to watch Kleon, whose premature appearance might spoil the fulfillment of the oracle, and since Nikias is in the habit of doing such errands for Demosthenes, he asks Demosthenes to inform the sausage seller of the oracle of the god. Demosthenes performs this task with the proper solemnity. The poor fellow is sensible enough to believe that he is being ridiculed when Demosthenes greets him as the one about to become, as the oracle in Demosthenes' hand pronounces, the absolute ruler of Athens, of the Athenian empire, and of the Greater Athenian empire of the imminent future. He sensibly wonders how he, a sausage seller, can become, let alone a ruler of the world, merely a man of standing, an *hombre*. Demosthenes replies that precisely because he is a low-class fellow he will rise to the greatest height in Athens. The sausage seller modestly declares himself to be unworthy of great power.

Demosthenes is dumbfounded by this sign of decency: "You do not mean to say that you stem from gentle folk?" "By the gods, I stem from low-class people." Demosthenes is reassured: If the sausage seller were ever so slightly decent, he would be unable to tackle Kleon. The sausage seller, who obviously has no inkling with how little breeding present-day Athens is governed, points out to Demosthenes the very defective character of his education: He knows nothing of the things of the Muses. He lacks the education belonging to either the Just Speech or the Unjust Speech of the *Clouds*. Demosthenes assures him that the less he knows the better: Leading the *demos*, far from any longer requiring a music education and an honorable character, requires ignorance and rascality. The sausage seller can now no longer avoid listening to the oracle. From both Demosthenes' introductory statement and the text of the oracle that he now quotes in part, it becomes clear that the oracle is not as simple and perspicuous as Demosthenes has led us to believe; for instance, one needs Demosthenes' considerable ingenuity in order to see that the blood-drinking serpent of which the oracle speaks signifies a sausage. Above all, the oracle as quoted says nothing about the fact that the rascality of the sausage seller is required for the overcoming of the rascal Kleon. When the sausage seller can not deny that the oracle as interpreted by Demosthenes flatters him, he expresses doubt of his ability to take care of the *demos*. Demosthenes silences him by showing that, quite apart from the oracle, the art and the vulgarity that the demagogue needs do not differ from the art and the vulgarity that the sausage seller already possesses fully. The sausage seller is now willing at least to take up the fight against Kleon, but he needs allies in that fight. These allies, Demosthenes assures him, will be the knights and the better people in general, to say nothing of Demosthenes himself and the god. Since the sausage seller is obviously afraid of the coming fight, Demosthenes gives him the further assurance that Kleon will not look as terrifying as usual: From fear of Kleon no craftsman has dared to make a mask resembling him closely, but since the spectators are clever, they will recognize Kleon. (Demosthenes proves again that he is the spokesman for the poet.) At this moment—at exactly the right moment—Nikias announces the approach of the formidable Paphlagonian.

Before turning to the action proper, let us consider the plan that originated in Demosthenes, not without Nikias' assistance. Kleon exercises quasi-tyrannical rule in Athens. He owes that power not to any merit but to his shameless demagoguery and brutality. He is feared by everyone, but he is hated above all by the better people. They are by themselves unable

to deprive him of his power. They need a demagogue still lower and meaner than Kleon who can out-Kleon him (cf. 328–32). It is in the light of this need felt by the knights and their comrades that Demosthenes interprets Kleon's oracle and uses it against Kleon. The better people do not run any risk in adopting this policy: The lowliest of the lowly or—this is the same in the view of the better people—the lowest of the low will always remain dependent on the better people; he is a safe instrument in their able hands.<sup>11</sup> This conceit may be described in the language of Spinoza as an eternal verity. We have observed in our time how the Prussian knights attempted to get rid of the demagogues of the Weimar Republic—of the rule of “the November criminals”—by using Hitler; the cleverest among them viewed Hitler as Demosthenes views the sausage seller. Yet their attempt was not inspired by an oracle. Or, more precisely, in the *Knights* the initiative is entirely with the better people: Demosthenes has to emancipate the sausage seller from his modesty by appealing to his modesty; the sausage seller is told by his betters and the god that he ought to act impudently, in a low-class manner, for his own good as well as for the good of the city; he does not follow his own impulses as Kleon does. In his humble way the sausage seller is just. But so is Demosthenes, as appears especially if one compares his action with that of Dikaiopolis. It is true that the oracle predicts (and thus sanctions) his action, i.e., his use of the oracle, as little as Amphitheos' divine mission in the *Acharnians* includes any reference to Dikaiopolis' action, i.e., his financing of Amphitheos' journey to Sparta; but Dikaiopolis uses his journey and its result for his private benefit alone. Demosthenes' action is juster than Dikaiopolis' action also for this reason: Amphitheos' speedy journey to Sparta and back, as well as the ensuing strictly private peace of Dikaiopolis, is much more incredible than the availability of writings that claim to be oracles and the ensuing expulsion of one demagogue by another.

Kleon appears. He smells that a conspiracy is afoot, a conspiracy against the *demos*; for in his view any conspiracy against his power is by this very fact a conspiracy against the *demos*. However despicable he may be, one can not deny that he possesses some political judgment; the dissatisfaction of his enemies with the rule of sellers is dissatisfaction with the rule of people belonging to the *demos*. The sausage seller recoils from Kleon, who is at his most terrifying. Demosthenes is compelled to ask the knights to come to the rescue of the sausage seller. These youngish men who form the chorus of the play arrive at once, eager to fight Kleon and to destroy him. Kleon in his turn calls on the old men who form the chief law court,

reminding them of the monetary benefits that he has bestowed on them by fair means or foul, yet no one comes to his help. Those on whom he calls are probably in the theater, enjoying the *Knights*; Demosthenes, we recall, had made sure of the good will of the audience. In the view of the knights, Kleon is justly deserted by everyone because of his injustice. In his despair Kleon tries to win over the very knights, his bitterest enemies, by claiming that he is being attacked because of the benefits that he was about to confer on them; they merely laugh at this shameless and pitiable last-minute attempt to appease them. He would be lost if the contest of blows were not replaced by a contest in shouting. This is done at the suggestion of the sausage seller, who thus reveals again that he is not deprived of all generous feelings, or that in his view the control over Demos will not go to the victor in a brawl in which Demos himself does not participate. As could be expected, Kleon accepts the proposal with pleasure; he immediately begins the new contest by accusing his opponent—of whom he knows nothing except that he is a low-class fellow—of betraying the city to the enemies with which she is at war. The sausage seller, with the support of Demosthenes, counters by charging Kleon with the embezzlement of public funds. In the ensuing exchange of threats, as well as of both accusations and boasts of thefts, perjuries and other illegal actions, Kleon has a slight edge over the sausage seller—which confirms the chorus' view of him, but also rekindles their fear of him and thus increases their anger at him. Their angry outburst at him is, to say the least, not inferior to anything that the vile sausage seller has achieved hitherto. But when the sausage seller turns to reviling Kleon for the dishonesty that he practiced in his leather trade, Kleon cannot repay him in the same coin because he knows nothing of the sausage seller or his trade. Here is the first clear victory for the sausage seller. The knights become convinced to their great satisfaction that the sausage seller surpasses Kleon in shamelessness and crookedness and hence will oust him. They show us to what extremes political hatred can drive men. Rejecting with angry contempt the very basis of their own claim to public respectability, they urge the sausage seller to show, by defeating Kleon in the contest for the crown of impudence, vulgarity, and crookedness, that breeding and moderation are meaningless things. They themselves do not show a trace of moderation. (When the sausage seller misses a chance for a vicious retort, they make up for it.) They do not for a moment pause to consider that precisely if their estimate of the sausage seller is sound, his rule will be worse for Athens and for them than Kleon's. Their recklessness is not justified

by the oracle. Perhaps it is justified by their trust in Demosthenes' dexterity.

Surer of the knights' approval than he was before, the sausage seller now has the initiative. He refuses to permit Kleon to have the first word. His eagerness to speak is not sufficiently explained by the upper-class support on which he can count; he must have some faith in his ability to speak. Kleon, who is proud of his oratory, which is inspired by his drinking unmixed wine, traces his opponent's self-confidence to some success that he has had as a low-class accuser against a helpless man by dint of the utmost exertion and continence. The sausage seller is indeed certain of his power as a speaker without the support of wine. He boasts that he needs only a hearty meal including soup in order to be superior to Kleon in outshouting the orators and in terrifying Nikias. Kleon and Demosthenes, in contradistinction to the sausage seller and Nikias (cf. 87-88), enjoy the drinking of unmixed wine; but while the sausage seller agrees with Nikias regarding temperance, he differs from him in his daring or manliness. His boast makes his upper-class allies wonder whether he, the low-class offspring of low-class people, deserves their trust since he is likely to think of nothing but his own interest (358-60). But this doubt lasts only for a moment. They give their whole attention to the contest of foul insults between Kleon and the sausage seller, which sways to and fro and in which the sausage seller now has an edge over Kleon. They surely have never heard a greater display of shamelessness. They encourage the sausage seller to give Kleon, who in their view is at bottom a coward, the knockout blow. But Kleon does not give up; he is sure of the support of the Council or of the *demos*. The chorus sees in Kleon's pertinacity merely another sign of that shamelessness of which Kleon himself is not ashamed to boast.

The sausage seller now tries to prove his superiority in shamelessness by boasting of his upbringing among the dregs of the populace. While a boy he was already an accomplished thief and perjurer. An orator who observed his cleverness prophesied that he would become a ruler of the *demos*. This prediction, based as it was on the observation of our sausage seller's nature, as well as on knowledge of Athenian politics, could seem to be a much better guarantee of his successor than the oracle which, apart from all other ambiguities, did not point to this sausage seller in particular. Another difference between the two predictions may be even more important. Our sausage seller has heard of the oracle only now through Demosthenes, whereas he knew the orator's prediction from his childhood. Yet that prediction did not have the slightest effect on him; it did not stir

this clever and unscrupulous scoundrel out of his easygoing and low-class life; it did not make him ambitious. He bore without murmuring and apparently even enjoyed his way of life. The reason is obvious: He did not believe in that prediction (cf. 426, 212); he was too modest to believe in it. Or, as we might also say, he is a petty rogue and vulgar fellow; knowing this, he knows his place; he knows that he justly belongs in the gutter in which he lives, and hence he defers to his betters. Nor is he the one who is filled with ferocious hatred of Kleon; he attacks Kleon out of respect for his betters. The obscurity in which he lives explains why Kleon, who of course knows the oracle concerning the sausage seller, does not feel at all threatened by our sausage seller. Kleon is unable to compete with him in vileness of upbringing; the shift from Kleon's rule to that of the sausage seller would manifestly bring about Athens' utmost degradation. Yet he can do no more than threaten that he will shake land and sea, like Poseidon (431; cf. 409), and thus defeat the sausage seller. To what straits he is reduced he shows by accusing the poor fellow of having robbed the city of an enormous amount of money, without specifying the amount involved and the place or other circumstances of the crime (435-36; cf. 280-81). The sausage seller's obscurity or namelessness proves to be an asset. He replies by accusing Kleon of a crime of the same kind, while specifying the amount involved and the place of the crime. It was a stab in the dark; but by a piece of good luck he has caught Kleon, who immediately relents, offering the sausage seller a cut if he will keep quiet. The knights have no doubt that that son of the gutter will gladly take the bribe, but to our great amazement he does not respond: He is exclusively concerned with gratifying his betters by winning the contest in insults, or rather in accusations; in his unbelievably vulgar way he is as superior to money as Perikles (cf. 472-74). The contest ends in a draw. But having rivaled Kleon in calumniating, he can be thought to have achieved a glorious victory. This is surely the opinion of the chorus, who had described the sausage seller earlier with enthusiasm as a greater knave than Kleon (328-29) but who praise him now, full of joy beyond words, as most excellent in flesh and soul and as the savior of the city and of themselves, the cream of the city. No wonder that immediately thereafter the sausage seller breaks all records by accusing Kleon of having entered into secret negotiations with the Spartans about the prisoners of Pylos with a view to his own advantage. Kleon's countercharge that his enemies are engaged not in one conspiracy but in many, one of them with the Persian king and with the Boiotians, is a very poor second compared with the sausage seller's

master stroke. Yet Kleon will bring his charge before the Council, to which he proceeds in the greatest rage and at the greatest speed. The sausage seller is urged by his betters to follow him there. He does this after having left behind with them the tools of his trade, but of course not his mean attire. They remind him of the feats that he has achieved in his boyhood as a thief and perjurer in his customary haunts: They expect him to act before the Council according to their mind.

We are not permitted to witness the proceedings before the Council, since they take place during the parabasis; for the action of the play must go on during the parabasis since it can not be completed until shortly before the end of the play. The parabasis of the *Knights* is remarkably irenic. Neither the poet nor the knights who form the chorus rebuke the city of Athens, nor do either of them boast of their merits or make demands on the city: Being engaged in a life and death struggle with the monstrous Kleon, they need all the good will they can get. In the parabasis proper the knights speak on behalf of the poet; this is in obvious agreement with Demosthenes' having acted as the poet's spokesman from the beginning of the play. As goes without saying, the knights' alliance with the poet differs profoundly from their alliance with the sausage seller; while the poet's power of foul invective is not inferior to that of the sausage seller, the sausage seller does not hate Kleon. The knights explain why Aristophanes, in contradistinction to the ancient comic poets, is the first who easily succeeded in inducing the knights to address the theater on his behalf; he hates the same men as they do, especially Kleon, and he dares to say the just things. The novel comedy of Aristophanes defends the ancient polity, the polity antedating the rule of the four sellers. The knights explain then—and this they do at the request of the poet—to that part of the audience that is interested in this kind of thing, why he so long deferred coming forward with comedies in his own name. According to the poet, presenting comedies is the most difficult work of all, and, besides, the Athenians are by nature singularly change-loving; he held back with his work known to be his lest he too soon become too old in the eyes of the public. To justify Aristophanes' conduct, the chorus speaks of three other comic poets who did not act as wisely as he did and, by implication, of his superiority to them as a comic poet. Two of these comic poets show clearly by their fate how bad it is for a comic poet to become an old comic poet. The author of the *Knights*, in contradistinction not only to those two comic poets but also to his incarnation as Dikaiopolis, is still young: The young author of a novel kind of comedy wishes to remain young as long

as possible, for he wishes to show a way toward the restoration of the ancient, which is a rejuvenation. The knights too are young (731).

Speaking for themselves the knights praise their fathers who, everywhere victorious, adorned the city and—unlike the men now pre-eminent in Athens—did not demand extraordinary honors as a reward for doing their duty. The knights nobly abstain from speaking of their own merits; they fight for the city and the gods of the land without any thought of rewards. They ask only that when peace comes they not be envied for their knightly looks. They do praise their horses, as it were their gods, and in particular the youngest ones, with special regard to the horses' recent feat near Corinth; it is not the knights' fault that, as a follower of Kleon himself stated, the Corinthian enemy ascribed the feat of the horses not to the horses but to the knights themselves. In the first strophe that forms part of the parabasis, the young horsemen—for all we know some of them may have been companions of our Pheidippides—pray to Poseidon, the son of Kronos, as the god who is at present (because of the recent victories of the navy and of the cavalry) dearer to the Athenians than any other god. They beseech him to come to their chorus. In the second strophe they pray to Athena, the protectress of their most holy land, which surpasses all others in war, poets, and power. They beseech her to come to them, together with their helper Nike, so that they may defeat both the comic poet's rivals and Kleon. The difference between Poseidon and Athena reminds us of the difference between the knights and the poet.

In the *Clouds* there was a powerful reason why we should not hear of the action that took place during the parabasis, i.e., Socrates' indoor instruction. In the *Knights* the sausage seller, who returns victorious from the Council meeting, gives a precise report of the important event that took place during the parabasis. He gives his report to the knights, who had been fearing for him—like maidens who fear for the beloved man who goes out to do battle for them with the enemy—and who now are not only relieved to see him back safe but are nobly overjoyed with his victory. Their noble welcome contrasts with his artless and crude report, but also with their own earlier utterances. Two reasons account for this change in the conduct of the knights. In the first place they had just acted as the spokesmen for the poet, and the cause of the poet is not simply identical with the cause of the knights. Above all, the prospect of Kleon's imminent defeat makes his well-bred enemies gentler; the knights are certainly much less savage in the second half of the play than they were in the first. As the sausage seller reports, Kleon had succeeded in arousing the Council

to the highest pitch of anger against the conspiracies of the knights: He had not even alluded to the utterly insignificant sausage seller. The sausage seller realized that his early education in shamelessness would not suffice for performing the task that his betters had assigned him; he called on all divinities of shamelessness for help. He knew better than to attempt to refute Kleon's charges. He did not even pretend, as Kleon still pretended, that the members of the Council are concerned with the well-being of the city, or at least with the preservation of the established regime. He appealed to each Council member's private advantage. He shouted to the Council the good news that sprats, which since the beginning of the war had been in short supply, had just become available at an unheard-of low price: No one yet knows of this most fortunate event, except the members of the Council; they must keep it secret until they have made their buy, and they must act fast; first come first served. They immediately forget all the public dangers. Kleon could not dare to question the truth of the sausage seller's announcement, let alone remind the Council of the public danger, without becoming utterly unpopular. He moves that on account of the happy event one hundred oxen be sacrificed to Athena. The Council approves the motion. The sausage seller has no choice except to out-Kleon Kleon by moving that two hundred oxen be sacrificed to Athena and in addition one thousand goats be vowed to Artemis. In his utmost perplexity Kleon now performs an about-face never surpassed by any earlier or later politician. Acting on the maxim that it is better to abandon one's policy than one's power, he suddenly turns from violently opposing all peace negotiations with Sparta to urging such negotiations: Let us make peace with Sparta now, and you will have still cheaper sprats tomorrow and ever after. But the members of the Council are much more interested in inexpensive sprats today than in peace and still cheaper sprats tomorrow. The Council meeting ends in a hurry. The sausage seller rushes to the market in order to buy for practically nothing all available seasonings for the sprats and to give the seasonings away to the Council members, who are, of course, immensely grateful to the man who not only brought them the good news about the cheap sprats but in addition gave them the seasonings gratis.

The knights barely have time to praise their ally, who in their view has shown again that he surpasses the rascally Kleon in rascalities—they no longer call the sausage seller rascal—and to warn him that the fight with Kleon is not yet over: The sausage seller has won two skirmishes; the decisive battle is yet to come. Kleon himself reappears. As is his wont, he is

filled with rage and sputters the direst threats, but now he swears with unusual frequency. His rage is now directed solely against the sausage seller; he does not say a word against the knights. It has taken him a long time to see that he is threatened, not by the knights or Demosthenes, but by the sausage seller. The sausage seller unintentionally reveals his superiority—one is tempted to say his natural superiority—to Kleon by the manner in which he responds to his opponent's threats. He is indeed as good as Kleon, or better, at threatening; but while Kleon is genuinely savage and full of hate (as were the knights), the sausage seller only plays the savage; he does not lose his ease and good nature while shouting the most terrible things. The exchange of threats leads inevitably to Kleon's threatening to drag his enemy before the *demos*, who will punish him for what he has done to Kleon. But even Kleon's ultimate and most powerful threat does not frighten the sausage seller, who is sure that he can defeat Kleon in the sovereign Assembly as he has defeated him in the street brawl as well as before the Council. Kleon boasts that he has the *demos* in his pocket. To this boast the sausage seller does not at first reply in kind; at first he merely replies: "How strongly you believe that the *demos* belongs to you." He lacks Kleon's *hybris* with respect to the *demos*, because he simply belongs to the *demos* or is simply a child of the *demos*; whereas Kleon despises the *demos*, the sausage seller has a filial respect for it (cf. 725). He who is deferential to Demosthenes and the knights is still more deferential to the *demos*. For the same reason he despises Kleon, who boasts of the cleverness with which he controls the *demos*; he replies to this boast by saying that his behind is as good as the whole of Kleon in cajoling and fooling the *demos*, but he knows that the *demos* can not be fooled "all of the time" (cf. 1121–30). Still, if the sausage seller looks forward with great confidence to the contest to be decided by the *demos*, we can not but tremble. He has proved his superiority to Kleon in the use of foul language and of calumnies, as well as in appealing to the private interest of the members of the Council. But will he be superior to Kleon in taking care of the public interest, be it only the public interest as the *demos* understands it at any given time? After all he completely lacks political experience. Besides, will Kleon, the recognized leader of the *demos*, not be its spokesman? Both difficulties are overcome, not by the sausage seller, but by the poet, who has so arranged things that the *demos* has taken on the shape of Demos, the master of a household, an individual who as such does not need a spokesman, and whose private interest completely takes the place of the public interest. As a consequence of the

personification of the *demos* Kleon is, just like Demosthenes, a slave of the *demos*, whereas the sausage seller is, or proves to be, a son of the house, and the knights simply do not "belong."

All of the action that could be observed by the audience had taken place in front of Demos' house. Demos is inside and knows nothing of the action of the play. He appears for the first time when the two opponents shout for him to come out. Kleon complains that he is being beaten by the sausage seller and the knights because he is in love with Demos. Demos does not pay any attention to the knights, but asks the sausage seller who he is. From the outset he is confronted with the choice not between Kleon and the knights but between Kleon and another plebeian. The sausage seller replies that he too is in love with Demos and wishes to do him well and that many gentlemen share his feeling, but that he and they are prevented by Kleon from benefiting Demos, and ultimately by Demos himself who, although an old man, behaves with the perverseness typical of beloved boys in preferring the basest lovers—sellers and craftsmen—to the respectable ones. He speaks as if he had become oblivious of his low-class origin and trade. His stricture on the low pursuits is not likely to have endeared him to Demos; still less could his rebuke of Demos' conduct toward his lovers do so. On the other hand, when Kleon called himself a lover of Demos, he meant that he was perfectly satisfied with Demos as he is or acts, or that he did not wish Demos to be changed a whit. Kleon goes beyond this. He explicitly defends Demos' amorous preference by saying that Kleon, and not the so-called respectable lovers, is the benefactor of Demos: It was Kleon who captured the Spartans at Pylos. The sausage seller asserts that Kleon's feat does not differ from an act of theft that the sausage seller committed on his way from his shop. This reply is good to the extent that it reveals to Demos the low origin of Kleon's enemy. Otherwise it is, to say the least, quite insufficient to discredit Kleon's claim in the eyes of Demos. Therefore, when Kleon asks Demos to hold an Assembly at once to decide the contest between his two lovers, and the sausage seller opposes Kleon's request by demanding that the decision not be made in the Pnyx, Demos decides in favor of Kleon's proposal. The sausage seller regards his cause as lost: Demos is amenable to reason only when he is in his house, i.e., when he acts with a private man's prudence in handling his own affairs. The knights do not share the sausage seller's despondency, but they do not deny that Kleon in the Assembly is the most formidable enemy. They warn the sausage seller of Kleon's Promethean resourcefulness; they no longer incite him to use the maximum of shame-

lessness and vulgarity. The contest in front of Demos is, if not of greater dignity, at least of greater gravity than the two preceding contests.

Kleon opens the decisive contest by praying to Athena that he be rewarded or punished in accordance with his merits or demerits in relation to the Athenian *demos*. The sausage seller does not pray, nor does he ask for any reward, but he expresses his willingness to undergo the most terrible and degrading human punishments if he does not love Demos and cherish him. Kleon begins to prove his love of Demos by telling the benefits that, as councilor, he bestowed on Demos in utter disregard of the well-being of any private citizen: Kleon can not for his life see Demos as a private citizen, as a human individual. Just the opposite is true of the sausage seller; for him, what Kleon calls private citizens are merely other human individuals like Demos himself; as he claims, it is the easiest thing in the world to rob other individuals for the benefit of Demos. He at once gives Demos a proof of his caring for him as a human being: He supplies him with a cushion so that he can sit comfortably on the hard stones of the Pnyx. Demos is greatly pleased with the sausage seller's act of kindness and wonders whether his benefactor is not a descendant of the tyrannicide Harmodios, whose memory is so dear to the *demos*, i.e., whether he is not of respectable descent: Courtesy to an old man is not the sign of a ruffian; he asks him who he is. Before the sausage seller can reply to his question, Kleon starts his counterattack by belittling the sausage seller's good deed, but he forgets to continue the enumeration of his own merits in relation to Demos. Unable to deny that the sausage seller was kind to Demos, he boasts that he himself is a good fighter for the *demos*. In the sausage seller's view, Kleon's contempt for small acts of kindness and his boasting of his fighting for the *demos* prove only his lack of compassion, which shows itself clearly in his preventing peace with Sparta and thus prolonging unnecessarily the misery in which Demos, who in peace lives comfortably in the country, lives in town. In other words, Kleon, like other politicians or "boasters," sees nothing but the *polis*, which is in a sense superhuman, and does not see the simple, unpretentious human beings who form the largest part of the *polis*. Kleon of course claims that he imposes this hardship on Demos for the sake of Demos' empire and pay; while Kleon provides Demos with the political goods (money and empire), the sausage seller provides him with what one may call the natural goods (783-85, 805-7, 868-74, 881-86). When the sausage seller asserts that Kleon's warlike and imperialist policy is a mere fraud that serves no other purpose but to keep Kleon in power, the demagogue replies that his merits surpass those of the

very founder of the Athenian empire, Themistokles. Having provoked Kleon to go to such lengths, having replied in particular that Themistokles preserved the old things and added new ones, i.e., having alluded to Kleon's destruction of the old, the sausage seller has no difficulty in eliciting the first indication of Demos' dissatisfaction with Kleon. He uses this opportunity to tell Demos what he should think of Kleon. Kleon thereupon attempts to accuse the sausage seller of the theft of public funds; the sausage seller easily defeats this attempt by a reply in kind. The knights can not restrain their joy over the first victory of the sausage seller before Demos himself; they prophesy to the sausage seller that if he continues along the road that he has taken, he will become the greatest of the Greeks—the sole ruler of Athens and her empire, comparable to Poseidon (840; cf. 431), the knights' god, and very rich to boot. Joyful in their anticipation of Kleon's final defeat, they forget that the sausage seller was meant to be baser than Kleon and acceptable only as a tool to be used by the better people for getting rid of Kleon.

Kleon, addressing the knights and swearing by Poseidon, calls their joy premature: His power is secure as long as anything remains of the shields taken at Pylos. Those shields, as the sausage seller accuses Kleon to Demos, are to be used by the leather-selling youths who conspire against Demos; the conspirators are not, as Kleon does not tire of asserting, the gentlemanly youths. Demos, who has been trained well by Kleon in believing in conspiracies, immediately believes the sausage seller's story and turns more strongly against Kleon than ever before. Having defeated Kleon on his favorite ground, the sausage seller makes the next move on his own favorite ground by asking that leather seller whether he has ever given leather to Demos for his shoes. Kleon is reduced to silence. Demos replies to the question with an emphatic No, strengthened by an oath. Thereupon the sausage seller gives Demos the pair of shoes that he himself is wearing—shoes that he had to buy. Demos declares him now to be the man who to his knowledge has acquired the greatest merit about the *demos* and is more benevolent than anyone else to the city and to the toes: Demos agrees with the sausage seller that benefiting the city means in the last analysis benefiting the bodies of the citizens. Kleon is shocked by this low understanding of politics; he points to what he has done to raise the moral level of the city by suppressing catamites. The sausage seller replies that Kleon took this action merely from envy: The catamites are potential orators.<sup>12</sup> Aristophanes' Kleon is as much as Thucydides' Kleon (III 38) an enemy of speeches. Whereas the sausage seller only lacks both

the ancient and the modern education, Kleon is opposed to both kinds of education. But to return with the sausage seller to the main issue, he now accuses Kleon of never having supplied Demos with the clothing befitting an old man in winter (we are in the midst of winter) and straightway gives Demos his own coat. Thereupon Demos declares that the sausage seller does not indeed surpass Themistokles, but equals him in wisdom and inventiveness. When Kleon bitterly complains about the monkey tricks with which the sausage seller harasses him, his opponent replies that he uses the very tricks by which Kleon himself acquired his power and preserved it; he only goes to the end of the road and thus beats Kleon at his own game (cf. 50-4). Kleon has no choice but to give Demos his own overcoat. Demos however is repelled by the stench of hide that the leather seller's overcoat exudes. The sausage seller reminds Demos—in this case the true *demos*, i.e., the audience—of still graver impairments of public health for which Kleon was responsible. Demos entirely agrees with the sausage seller. When Kleon calls the sausage seller a scoundrel for disconcerting him with buffooneries, his opponent replies that he does what he does because the goddess has commanded him to defeat Kleon by false pretenses or boasts: The modest sausage seller plays the boaster from modesty, from deference to his betters and, ultimately, to the gods. Kleon does not notice that the sausage seller refers to the oracle. But having seen by now that all his past benefactions to Demos are of no avail, he promises Demos future benefits; he even promises to make him a young man by pulling out his gray hairs. The sausage seller who, among other things, knows better than Kleon what genuine rejuvenation means, counters Kleon's promises of future benefits by present gifts (904-10). Kleon is now completely helpless; he threatens the poor sausage seller with monetary burdens and with fines that would ruin the wealthiest man. The sausage seller does not threaten Kleon with anything; he merely wishes him the worst. He is sure that everything will work out well by itself. We remember that he never did anything to bear out the prediction which he had received as a boy that he would rule the *demos* (425-26). His wish regarding Kleon is fulfilled, although not literally, at once. Demos, agreeing with the sausage seller's literal wish, praising him as a citizen of singular goodness to the many, deprives Kleon of his power. Kleon, probably remembering the oracle, warns Demos that his successor will be worse than he was; he does not even dream that the sausage seller could become his successor. Yet the discovery with the sausage seller's help of another fraud perpetrated by Kleon on Demos suffices to induce the master to appoint the sausage seller as his steward,

i.e., to make the sausage seller the successor to Kleon; he deprives Kleon of the ring of office and gives it to the sausage seller.

Kleon, who knows that he will be deprived of his power by a certain sausage seller but does not know or remember that his present opponent is a sausage seller, is certain that Demos' decision is not the end of the story. Yet he is cowed; he senses more strongly than before his dependence on Demos: He addresses him now as master. After all, the ring is now on the sausage seller's finger. Having seen that neither his past benefits nor his promises of future benefits help him, he turns to the divine promises, to the oracles in his possession. The sausage seller would be unable to defeat him if he could not meet him on that ground too; he too claims to possess oracles. This does not do away with the fact that Kleon has now regained the initiative; the sausage seller follows in Kleon's footsteps more slavishly or literally than before; he uses the very expressions first used by Kleon (960-72; cf. 996-97). Above all, the sausage seller is unable to compete with Kleon's claim that according to his oracles Demos will rule not only—as according to Kleon's policy—all Greeks (797) but rather—along the lines of Demosthenes' promise to the sausage seller (169-74)—every land. While the two rivals leave in order to fetch their oracles, the knights welcome the day when Kleon will have perished, while admitting that Athens owes to him some ambiguous blessings—blessings that are in agreement with the education peculiar to him or his swinish taste in music. It would appear—and this would be entirely in the spirit of the oracle as interpreted by both Demosthenes and Kleon—that Kleon's education, however low, was still superior to the sausage seller's (cf. 986-87, 1235-36).

Kleon claims that the oracles in his possession stem from Bakis, while the sausage seller claims that the oracles in his possession stem from Bakis' older (and hence better) brother. It almost goes without saying that while Bakis speaks of Pylos, Bakis' older brother is silent about Pylos. It is perhaps more important to observe that the sausage seller, in contradistinction to Kleon, uses obscene language.<sup>13</sup> It is surely most important that both sets of oracles make a distinction between Athens and Demos; yet while Kleon assigns to Demos the central place among the themes of his oracle, the sausage seller does not. Since Kleon had asserted that his oracle promised Demos universal rule, Demos wishes to hear from both rivals the oracle that predicts that he will become an eagle in the clouds. Yet Kleon, who is much more concerned with his rule in Athens than with Demos' rule over the whole earth, quotes to him an Apollinic oracle that, according to his interpretation, urges Demos to preserve Kleon's rule.

Demos does not understand the oracle as quoted by Kleon, and the sausage seller asserts that that oracle in fact warns Demos against Kleon. He then quotes one of his own oracles which, according to his interpretation, is another warning addressed to Demos against Kleon, and which appeals at once to Demos. Kleon is not nimble enough to contest that interpretation. He therefore quotes another of his oracles which, while alluding to the navy, according to his interpretation recommends him to Demos; Demos again fails to understand the oracle, and the sausage seller again interprets the oracle as being directed against Kleon's rule. Neither of the two rivals has hitherto complied with Demos' wish that they recite to him the oracle that predicts a splendid future for him; this failure was primarily due to Kleon's preoccupation with his own fate. Now the sausage seller goes so far as to speak in oracular language of Demos' lack of good counsel. This induces Kleon to quote an oracle dealing with Pylos: Pylos proves that Demos, following Kleon's advice, was excellently counseled. But this oracle has the same fate as his two preceding oracles. The sausage seller then turns to an oracle about the navy (without the navy no Pylos), an oracle that Demos is very eager to hear, since he is worried about how his sailors will get their pay; but that oracle too proves to be above all a warning against Kleon and, more particularly, against his unjust policy toward Athens' allies. While forbidding injustice, the oracle does not show how the necessity leading to injustice can be overcome; the sausage seller promises to overcome it. This time Demos had difficulty in understanding the sausage seller's oracle, but Kleon was unable to use this opportunity for questioning the sausage seller's interpretation of the oracle. The sausage seller exploits Kleon's helplessness by quoting another oracle; this time Kleon does contest the sausage seller's interpretation. Yet this fact merely underlines the sausage seller's general superiority on Kleon's favorite ground: Although much less familiar than Kleon with the use of oracles, he has learned much faster and better than Kleon how to interpret them to Demos' satisfaction. He will soon prove to be not inferior to Kleon in inventing oracles. After Kleon's oracles supporting his rule have been thoroughly discredited, he turns to fulfilling Demos' wish to hear the oracle predicting him a splendid future: Demos will become an eagle and king of the whole earth. An oracle of the sausage seller adds to the rule over the whole earth rule over the Red Sea and a judgeship in Ekbatana. He as it were suggests that if Athens must expand she should expand toward the East, rather than toward the West (cf. 174). These oracles dealing with universal rule are not even pretended to be quoted but are

obviously made up by the two antagonists as they go; these oracles possess even less authority than Kleon's oracles supporting his rule. Kleon finally tells of a dream in which Athena seemed to him to pour wealth and health over the *demos*; the sausage seller in his turn had a dream in which Athena seemed to him to pour ambrosia over Demos' head and a fluid of an opposite character over Kleon's. The sausage seller's dream brings Demos back to the issue before him: He gives himself over to the sausage seller—to a man without any education—as an educator, for his re-education. Demos does not long for universal empire any more. His dream of universal empire was sustained by oracles. For a long time Kleon had succeeded in controlling Demos by means of the oracles in his possession and by preventing Demos from hearing other oracles or other men's interpretations of his own oracles (cf. 58–61). This defect in Demos' education is cured in the oracles scene, which taught him that every oracle—whether of Bakis or of Apollon or of anybody else—can be matched by an oracle of the opposite purport and that the same oracle can easily be interpreted to predict opposite things. This is not to deny that Demos' rejection of Kleon is supported by the oracles as interpreted by the sausage seller, although not exclusively by them. Yet Demos' surrender to the sausage seller's guidance and surely his newly arisen desire for re-education have no oracular support whatever. We must also remember that regarding the only subject concerning which Demos spontaneously desired information during the oracles scene—how his sailors and soldiers will get their pay (1065–79)—the oracles were silent.

One does not appreciate the oracles scene properly if one does not remember that the whole action of the *Knights* was triggered by an oracle or a certain interpretation of an oracle. But that oracle or interpretation can not be properly appreciated before one knows the outcome of the action.

Kleon makes a last effort to ingratiate himself with Demos, who is cured of his dream of empire, by offering to take care of his daily needs. He has now thoroughly learned what the sausage seller knew from the very beginning, namely, to treat Demos as an individual, as a human being. Hence the two rivals now engage in a contest regarding the dishes that would be most pleasing to Demos. How important this issue is in the eyes of Demos can be seen from the fact that he tacitly revokes his decision in favor of the sausage seller by declaring that his decision will depend on which of the two rivals will feed him best. The third and last round of the popularity contest will be decided by Demos' belly alone; we have done for good with political

and sacred considerations. While the rivals prepare their offerings to Demos indoors, the knights, who had been completely silent during the oracles scene, address Demos for the first time. Thanks to the sausage seller they have become completely reconciled to Demos, and they are sure that the sausage seller will win the final round as he has won all previous rounds. They flatter Demos by praising him as the tyrant ruler over all men, while deploring that he is an easy prey to all flatterers. Demos replies that they are the fools if they regard him as a fool; he does not mind the appearance of being fooled by his stewards; he uses those thieves for his well-considered purposes and gives them at last what they deserve. All the while he is greatly annoyed because he has to wait so long for the culinary delights for which Kleon and the sausage seller had whetted his appetite. This annoyance is compensated by the pleasure that he derives from observing the rivalry between his two lovers, who by now have come back, in gratifying him. While they compete in making him comfortable, Kleon reminds him of what he has done for him at Pylos and the sausage seller of what Athena has done and is doing for him. Kleon has no choice but to follow his rival in praising the goddess. The uneducated but moderate sausage seller as it were educates Kleon, who is somewhat less uneducated but full of *hybris*, in piety. Or, if Kleon might have had some head start in displaying piety (cf. 763, 1091–92), the sausage seller now has overtaken him. But the contest will not be decided on the ground of piety, for the climax is reached when the sausage seller cheats Kleon of the merit of having prepared a most delicious dish for Demos' enjoyment in as exact an imitation as possible of the manner in which Kleon cheated Demosthenes of the merit of having reduced the Spartans at Pylos. When Demos, full of admiration for the sausage seller's feat, asks him how he had thought of it, he piously traces the feat to Athena, although the trick that he uses against Kleon merely repeats a trick that as a boy he had used on the market (cf. 1193–98 with 417–20). He thus shows his superiority not only to Kleon, who before now had always claimed for himself the whole merit of the victory at Pylos, but also to Demosthenes, who had traced the conceit of consulting Kleon's oracles for the purpose of destroying him to the spirit of wine (1203, 108; cf. 903). Demos now acts exactly as he had done after Pylos: He gives the whole credit for his gratification not to the cook but to him who served him the dish. Kleon admits for the first time that he is in danger of being surpassed in impudence by his rival (1206; cf. 409). This sets the stage for the sausage seller's final move in the contest. He asks Demos to decide now which of the two rivals is the better man in regard to Demos and especially

to his belly by comparing the contents of the baskets of the two. The sausage seller's basket proves to be empty and Kleon's to be full of good things. Not without the sausage seller's assistance, Demos thus realizes that while the sausage seller has given everything he had to his dear little daddy, Kleon, that slave in need of whipping, has cheated his master of the largest share. Kleon protests that he had stolen in the interest of the city, i.e., he denies the identity of the city and the *demos*. Demos can not permit this distinction. He commands Kleon to return the garland that Demos had given him formerly, so that he can crown the sausage seller with it.

Kleon knew quite well that this fate would overtake him sooner or later, for he knew his oracles. But one of his oracles makes him certain that the fateful moment has not yet come: His rival can not be the individual designated by the oracle as his conqueror and successor. This does not mean that in his view the oracle designates his successor by name, for he does not know his rival's name. His certainty that the sausage seller is not his successor is based on his certainty that the oracle designates as his successor a man of a certain kind and that his rival is not a man of that kind. Less oracularly, he knows that his successor will belong to a certain kind of sausage seller, but his rival seems to him to be of a type higher than any sausage seller (cf. 1235-44): He knows that his successor will be a greater rogue than he himself (949-50), but he has sensed as well as we did that his rival does not meet this condition (cf. 1252). The sausage seller on his part contends that the oracle designates him very clearly by name. This contention is not borne out by the text of the oracle, or by the only interpretation of the oracle of which we know (197-210). Kleon proceeds to cross-examine his rival in order to prove to him, and above all to Demos, that this individual does not meet the requirements laid down by the oracle. To his horror Kleon learns that his rival had no education whatever as a child except in vulgarity and impudence—the sausage seller now conceals the fact that he has some knowledge of letters (189)—and that when grown up he exercised the trade of a sausage seller and occasionally took the passive part in homosexual relations (1242; cf. schol. on 428). Only one very tenuous hope remains for Kleon. The oracle designates as his successor a man who sells sausages at the gates of the city and not in the market place. When Kleon learns that his rival sells his sausages at the gates he knows that his end has come, for he firmly believes in his oracle, i.e., in his interpretation of the oracle. As a matter of fact, the oracle does not say anything about the gates of the city as distinguished from the market. Kleon's interpretation is reasonable—given the fact that according to the

oracle his successor will be less respectable than he himself—if we assume that a sausage seller plying his trade at the gates will be still less respectable than a man who sells his merchandise in the market place: The beardless sophisticates who exude the novel education spend their time in the market place (1373–81), and is not the novel education from a certain point of view better than no education at all? Yet, however sound Kleon may be as an interpreter of oracles, he is no match for the sausage seller as a user of oracles. He claimed that he is designated in the oracle by name. As he discloses after Kleon is ruined beyond hope of repair, his name is *Agorakritos*; his name points to the market, not to the gates of the city. That is to say, the oracle as interpreted by Kleon rules out our sausage seller, as Kleon has contended, or is in favor of Kleon's continuing in office for the time being. Kleon is a victim not simply of his belief in his oracles or in his interpretation of his oracles, but more immediately of the sausage seller's lie about his status: With an amazing cleverness he has divined Kleon's interpretation of the oracle and lied accordingly. The right kind of clever lies are better than oracles, however cleverly interpreted. The sausage seller's lie can not be detected as long as the detection might do him harm, because he is wholly unknown to everyone present; he derives the greatest advantage from his being a nobody. He did gamble. No wonder that he gives the prize of victory to Zeus.

The sausage seller's use of Kleon's oracle dispels the last doubt as to his now being eager to take Kleon's place. This seems to conflict with his modesty, not to say humility. This difficulty is underlined by a brief scene in which Demosthenes appears again after a long lapse of time. He has completely lost his feeling of being superior to the sausage seller. He approaches him with the request to remember that he has become a man of standing thanks to him and to give him a lucrative job. The sausage seller does not even reply. It would be wrong to say that Demosthenes is as much cheated by the sausage seller of his victory over Kleon as he was by Kleon of his victory over the Spartans, for, as we have seen, the victory over Kleon was entirely the work of the sausage seller alone. The impious Demosthenes is defeated by the sausage seller just as the impious Socrates is defeated by Strepsiades. More precisely, as will soon become clear, the impious Demosthenes is defeated by unforeseeable Chance, just as the impious Socrates is defeated by the unforeseen effect on Strepsiades of the conclusion regarding incest from the Socratic teaching about the gods. Far from being a tool of Demosthenes, the knights, or the better people generally, the sausage seller proves to be the loving son of Demos: He is now

eager to rule because he has seen that he is better fitted to take care of his old father than any of the mercenary slaves (Kleon, Demosthenes, Nikias, and so on) on whom Demos had hitherto to depend. He acts as if, having been exposed as an infant, he has now recognized his father and been recognized by his father, who repents of his mistake.

While the sausage seller begins to take care of Demos indoors, we are entertained by the second parabasis. The second parabasis surely is not as irenic as the first; the reason why the knights were irenic in the first parabasis has been disposed of by Kleon's ruin. On the other hand, the second parabasis abstains even more than the first from pleading for, or praising, the knights or the poet; but this abstention is likely to have different reasons in the two cases. Nor is there a strong link between the subjects of the second parabasis and the action of the play. One might find a tenuous link between the last round of the contest for Demos' favor and the two strophes that lampoon men notorious for being famished or voracious. The antepirrhema describes a rebellion of the triremes against the imperialism in a western direction as advocated by the lamp seller Hyperbolos. Shall we say then that the second parabasis is more revealing by what it does not say than by what it says? Having understood the bearing of the brief and ominous reappearance of Demosthenes, we believe that we understand why the knights should now be almost completely silent about themselves—only at the beginning (1266) do they allude to horsemen—and simply silent about the action of the play. In the epirrhema they assert the propriety of blaming wicked people, yet the man whom they blame is blamed not because he is wicked—although he is wicked through and through—but for a different reason: Even the worst wickedness—a wickedness surpassing that of Kleon—is not as bad as the quality of Ariphrades, a corrupter of music and poetry who is unsayably obscene. (Aristophanes manages to say how obscene he is.) Did the knights change their minds as to what the worst thing is? Neither in the second parabasis nor afterward do they say anything about Kleon and hence against him.

During the second parabasis the sausage seller has transformed Demos completely. From old and ugly he has made him young and beautiful;<sup>14</sup> he has restored him to the state in which he was in the olden times, in the times preceding the rule not only of the sellers but even of Perikles, nay, of Themistokles; he has restored him to the state in which he was in pre-democratic Athens: After his restoration he looks like one of the Athenian nobles of the olden times;<sup>15</sup> he has restored him to the shape that he had at Marathon, when he defended his sacred land against the barbarian in-

vaders and had not yet begun to dream of empire. The knights hail him indeed as king of the Greeks, but the sausage seller, who knows better, refrains from doing so. Athens had been decaying more and more; she had been aging more and more; the better citizens were longing with ever-increasing despair and fury for the good old times, for the restoration of the ancestral polity, i.e., for the rejuvenation of Athens. The rejuvenation of Athens requires that the *demos* be rejuvenated, i.e., brought back to its ancient deference to the better people. But is this possible? <sup>16</sup> If the decay of Athens is due not to mere mistakes but to the aging of the *demos*, the *demos* must be literally rejuvenated. The *demos* rejuvenates itself literally by the passing away of its older members and by the coming in of new members, like a river. This is obviously not the longed-for rejuvenation. The literal rejuvenation is possible only if the *demos* is personified: A being like Demos can be rejuvenated literally, as is proven by the feat of Medea; a human being (as distinguished from a being that is a conflation of human beings) can be rejuvenated by magic, or rather by a god-like action like the one now performed by the sausage seller. Demos' rejuvenation is prepared by the fact that even in his old age he behaved like a boy who is wooed by lovers (737); he behaved as if he were still young and beautiful. Demos never grew up; he always remained in need of tutelage. This much is clear: The longing for the good old times can not be satisfied by political action. The nonpolitical action for which it calls must proceed from the invention of marvelous conceits (1322), i.e., from altogether novel conceits. In this way the Aristophanean comedy becomes completely reconciled with the city. Such a reconciliation is necessary because what is politically healthy is the old or ancestral, whereas the boast of comedy, and especially of Aristophanean comedy, is the novelty of its conceits; <sup>17</sup> in other words, the bringing back of Marathonian Athens, which the sausage seller has apparently achieved, renders impossible not only Socrates and all his works but the Aristophanean comedy as well. Yet now we see that there is a secret bond between the young Aristophanes' novel comedy, which aspires to the restoration of the ancient regime, and the young sausage seller's rejuvenating action, an action that requires more than the beating of one's father; it requires that he be cooked.

Demos reappears, having become young and beautiful and overflowing with gratitude to his rejuvenator. The two men have a dialogue that lasts until the end of the play. The chorus, which in all other plays has the last word or almost the last word, is silent in the last seventy-four lines of the *Knights*: The knights have become as irrelevant as Demosthenes; the

city is entirely in the hands of Demos and his rejuvenator, who is now as much Demos' father as he was his child.<sup>18</sup> Demos, who always was in tutelage, will remain in tutelage. The sausage seller tells the grateful Demos that if he knew the extent of the change that he has undergone thanks to the rejuvenation, he would regard him as a god. Since thereupon he lets him know the extent of that change, we are entitled to expect that Demos will regard the sausage seller as a god and treat him accordingly: The sausage seller will become the absolute ruler of Demos. He lets Demos know the extent of the change that he has undergone by reminding him of the grave mistakes he used to commit and by inducing him to state the outlines of his future conduct. It appears that there is no question whatever of scuttling the navy, although there is complete silence about the empire or panhellenic rule. Demos also declares, agreeing therein entirely with the Just Speech, that from now on unbearded youths will not be permitted to spend their time in the market, sophisticating and politicking: Demos will compel them to go hunting. As a reward for his good intentions the sausage seller supplies Demos with a healthy boy for his use, thus confirming Demos' restoration to his ancient state. He next supplies him with a young woman, the Thirty Years' Truce, for his enjoyment, asking him to take her and to go to the fields: With the return of peace the individual called Demos can return to the country life for which he had longed. To this extent the fate of Demos reminds us of the fate of Dikaiopolis. Yet the sausage seller may mean more than this. The rejuvenation of the *demos* means transforming the corrupt, predominantly urban *demos*, which is in a constant state of political excitement, into the predominantly rural *demos* of the olden times, when the tillers of the soil minded each his own business, leaving the government in the hands of their betters.<sup>19</sup> If we remember how the sausage seller treated Demosthenes when this distinguished man made his last appearance, we will be inclined to go even further and view the sausage seller's action in the light of the first action that Plato's perfect ruler performs after he has acquired power: Plato's perfect ruler too begins his rule by sending the *demos* "into the fields." We shall surely recognize in the sausage seller a super-Peisistratos.<sup>20</sup> The last of the hero's three final actions consists in meting out proper punishment to Kleon. As we ought to have expected, it is not harsh. Kleon is condemned to sell sausages at the gates of the city—sausages containing a mixture not only of the flesh of dogs and donkeys but of other parts of dogs and donkeys as well—while exchanging insults with the strumpets who ply their trade there.

At first glance it seems that the happy ending of the play is the fulfill-

ment of an oracle, just as the happy ending of the *Acharnians* may seem to be ultimately due to the action of the divine Amphiheos. Closer inspection shows that the end of the play, which is indeed the final outcome of Demosthenes' view of Kleon's oracle, is at variance with the spirit of that oracle, i.e., with that oracle as interpreted by both Demosthenes and Kleon.<sup>21</sup> The oracle led us to expect that Kleon would be defeated and succeeded by a man still more despicable than he. More generally stated, the oracle seemed to predict an ever-increasing decay of Athens. We are in no position to say whether the oracle in fact had this misanthropic character, since we hear only a small part of it literally quoted, and that part does not bear out the misanthropic interpretation. But perhaps one can say that the agreement between men so different from one another as Demosthenes and Kleon regarding its interpretation puts that interpretation beyond any doubt. Apart from this, the misanthropic interpretation of the oracle, which in a way governs the whole action of the play, is in agreement with the only teaching regarding the gods that is adumbrated within the play, namely, Nikias' proof of the existence of the gods. This is not to deny that there are also philanthropic oracles, but the oracles quoted in the *Knights* just do not happen to predict Demos' glorious future. Yet whatever the god or the oracle may have intended, the sanguine, active, and unbelieving Demosthenes transforms the doom into a policy. He does this in the first place by giving the oracle a rational interpretation: Since Kleon has enthralled the *demos* through his shamelessness, he can be defeated only by someone surpassing him in shamelessness. Besides, he foresees the effect of the apparent fulfillment of the oracle on Demos and Kleon, who believe in oracles. Not the oracle but a human promise is fulfilled. But even Demosthenes' hope falls far short of the outcome. This is owing to the fact, in no way foreseen by either the oracle or Demosthenes, that the particular sausage seller who happened to pass by when Demosthenes was looking for a sausage seller proved to be quite an extraordinary man.

That sausage seller proves to be not only not worse than Kleon but better than all earlier statesmen: He proves to be a godlike man. While this ending is at variance with the oracle and Demosthenes' plan, it is however not altogether unexpected. As the action proceeds, the character of the sausage seller reveals itself as altogether different from what we had been led to believe: The lowest of the low proves to be the born ruler, the natural ruler in the most exacting sense of the term. At the beginning he seems to be a fellow whom a decent man would not touch with a ten-

foot pole and would use only in a desperate situation; eventually the unsavory means becomes a resplendent end, a man who is justified in looking down even on Demosthenes. As the action proceeds, it becomes clear that while he utterly lacks breeding or while his manners surpass those of Kleon in shamelessness and vulgarity, he possesses the virtues of both Demosthenes and Nikias while he is free from the vices of either. If it is permitted to illustrate what seems to be a purely comic situation by a tragic situation, the sausage seller is superior to Demosthenes and Nikias in the same way in which Shakespeare's Julius Caesar is superior to Brutus and Cassius. More than this: As a man who truly deserves to rule, he is not eager to rule; he is less than any one else in the play a busybody and, at any rate, in this respect altogether just. He does possess the unenviable qualities through which Kleon surpasses the gentlemen Demosthenes and Nikias, but he uses these qualities for an altogether decent purpose, first deferring to the judgment of his betters and then guided by his own understanding (cf. *Lysistrata* 1109). In other words, the lowest possible breeding is more than adequate for coming to power in a democracy. The sausage seller is more capable than anyone else of gratifying Demos' whims, but he gratifies them only in order to make him receptive to what is by nature good for him. He is enabled to surpass Demosthenes, Nikias, and Kleon because he alone, this peculiar child of the lowest *demos*, "by nature loves the *demos*" (cf. *Clouds* 1187); he has compassion with the *demos*. However indecently he may have behaved in his boyhood and after he has grown up, prior to the play or within the play, he has never acted improperly or contemptuously toward the *demos*. The natural ruler of the city and hence in particular of the *demos* must above everything else be a lover or friend of the *demos*, and such love is most likely to come from a child of the *demos*. The sausage seller abolishes the extreme democracy out of love for the *demos* from which he stems: Everything for the *demos* and by the authority of the *demos*, but nothing through the *demos*. We are thus led to think that the best regime consists of the *demos* and its best child, who acts as its father, in other words, that the best regime is not in need of an upper class, a class of gentlemen. Aristophanes' experiment is diametrically opposed to Aristotle's experiment in the two last books of the *Politics*, where we find a best regime without any *demos*, consisting only of gentlemen; but it foreshadows to some extent Plato's city of pigs.

If the sausage seller is a most desirable ruler, we must revise our notion according to which education and gentlemanship are prerequisites for

decent rulership. The sausage seller, to repeat, lacks both the ancient education praised by the Just Speech and the novel education praised by the Unjust Speech. Yet he possesses all the virtues required for ruling well. This means that his virtue is altogether by nature.<sup>22</sup> He has the root of the matter in himself. From this it follows that education and gentlemanship are not as important, not to say all important, as is generally thought, especially by the gentlemen.<sup>23</sup> For Demosthenes it goes without saying that a man of lowly status, origin, and upbringing can not but be a low character: Decency comes from decent upbringing, upper class or perhaps rural; it can not arise in the dregs of the urban populace. Demosthenes is a very clever man, but he is refuted by the action of the play; he is shown not to have given sufficient thought to the character and conditions of virtue and vice. It is no longer necessary to speak of his political blindness: How can he have any trust in the sausage seller's gratitude to him and his like if the sausage seller is as thoroughly rotten as Demosthenes believes him to be? Yet the mere fact that he himself is a slave (of the *demos*) should be sufficient to enlighten him. At the beginning the sausage seller regards himself as a petty rogue and most vulgar fellow and believes that he therefore justly lives in the gutter; that is to say, from the point of view of the gentlemen he possesses self-knowledge, just as the gentlemen possess self-knowledge. But as we see in retrospect, both the sausage seller and the gentlemen lack self-knowledge; at the end of the play the sausage seller has acquired self-knowledge; whether Demosthenes has acquired it, one can not say. The only evidence that the better people possess of the sausage seller's crookedness is what he himself told them of his boyish pranks (cf. 483-84).

The *Knights* can be said to be Aristophanes' most political play; it is the only play without gods, poets, and women (and children). We are therefore not surprised that it should reveal the natural ruler of the city. By showing that that ruler is a man without any education, it reveals the relation between the city and education, or the gulf separating the city from the sphere of the Muses. That gulf, like some others, can be bridged. Yet the bridge proves that there is a gulf. Let us compare the action of the *Knights* with that of the *Acharnians*, in which the poet himself, thinly disguised, is the hero. Dikaiopolis succeeds in swaying the *demos* (*Acharnians* 626), but the *demos* there is in fact only a part of the *demos*: the old Acharnians. Dikaiopolis shows by his whole conduct that he does not love the *demos*. The pleasures that he enjoys and conjures are indeed, in contradistinction to Socrates' pleasures, communicable to many, not to say to all, but he is not primarily concerned with communicating them.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, Dikaiopolis' action is of questionable justice, while the sausage seller's is not. In accordance with this, not the sausage seller, but Demosthenes and the Knights are from the beginning the poet's spokesmen in the *Knights*. With a view to all this we are compelled to retract our sanguine suggestion that in the *Knights* the Aristophanean comedy becomes completely reconciled with the city: In the good city, the city rejuvenated by the natural ruler, not only Socrates but Aristophanes as well would be impossible.

The Aristophanean comedies are sometimes compared to fairy tales. By a fairy tale one probably means the story of the fulfillment of a perfectly just wish—a fulfillment that is impossible but presented as having taken place and that is exhilarating but not ridiculous. The *Knights* comes closer than any other Aristophanean comedy to being a fairy tale in this sense. The sausage seller, to say nothing of the other actors and the chorus, does and says as many laughable things as any other Aristophanean hero, but all or almost all of those things are deliberate parodies of Kleon's deeds and speeches. He acts ridiculously on purpose. He himself is not ridiculous. This becomes clear particularly at the end of the play. However ridiculous a sausage seller in rags, using foul language and playing monkey tricks, may be, once he has revealed himself fully as the natural ruler, the rags and everything going with them have fallen off, and he is clothed in greater splendor than Demos having become young and beautiful. There "the right of nature shines forth" (cf. *Gorgias* 484<sup>a</sup> 6-7), burying with disgrace everything concealing and denying it. Nothing is more revealing than his dismissing Demosthenes without a word. Viewed in the light of the ending, the natural ruler's having been a sausage seller seems to be like the disguise of a fairy-tale prince. Yet, like a true fairy-tale prince, the natural ruler of the *Knights* was a true sausage seller who did not know that he is something better, who did not claim to be something better and did not wish to be something better. In a word, he is in no sense a boaster. From the point of view of very crude people—and Aristophanes is, to say the least, never oblivious of their point of view—every man who claims to be distinguished or to excel is a man who "wishes to be something special" or is a boaster and hence ridiculous. From that point of view Socrates and Aristophanes are, of course, boasters. The sausage seller's neither claiming nor wishing to be "something special" is an important part of his charm. Perhaps we are also bidden to think that the true ruler is less open to ridicule within the compass of comedy—of a kind of work primarily addressed to crowds—than poets and philosophers.

One must also consider the fact that the plan that triggers the action of

the *Knights*—Demosthenes' conceit to use Kleon's oracles for his destruction—is much more reasonable and hence much less ridiculous than Strepsiades' plan to get rid of his debts with the help of Socratic rhetoric and Dikaiopolis' plan to live in peace by financing Amphitheos' journey to Sparta and back. But the happy ending of the *Knights* is not in accordance with Demosthenes' plan. Strepsiades' turning to Socrates and Dikaiopolis' availing himself of Amphitheos are perfectly rational compared with the coincidence that a sausage seller, and this particular sausage seller, turns up just at the moment when Demosthenes has read Kleon's oracles. The natural ruler comes to power through a more than improbable act of Chance: Only such an act of Chance can bring the natural ruler to power, precisely because the natural ruler must be a child of the lowest *demos*, hence must live in the utmost obscurity, and must be perfectly free from ambition or can become a ruler only by being compelled to become it. It is above all for this reason that the sausage seller is the comic equivalent of Julius Caesar. This is to say nothing of the fact that the happy ending of the *Knights* requires the rejuvenation of Demos and therefore the personification of the *demos*. The action of the *Knights* partakes no less than that of the other plays of the ridiculous character of the impossible. Nothing remains then than to leave matters at the reasonable wish that the city be ruled by the well-bred or the gentlemen.<sup>25</sup>

The personification of the *demos* differs from the personification of the clouds and the two Speeches because what the clouds and the two Speeches stand for are parts of man, while Demos is a conflation of many human beings into one human being; while the Clouds and the two Speeches can talk, Demos not only talks but also eats and sleeps. The two Speeches are between the Clouds and Demos, since only the Clouds are goddesses; Demos, whom all men fear like a tyrant, who is so eager to be served and flattered, who fattens his servants in order to devour them (1111–20, 1131–40), is even less of a god than the two Speeches. Yet Kleon, who pretends to be Zeuslike, depends absolutely on Demos. Through the personification of the *demos* the city becomes a household. The reduction of the city to the household has two different reasons. The first is indicated by the word "fraternity": All fellow citizens ought to be like brothers. Besides, Demos' return to the country is a return from the sphere of boasting to that of the enjoyment (and procuring) of the natural goods, to the "economic" life (805–9), comparable to Dikaiopolis' action. The sausage seller's action parodies, and is prepared by, Kleon's action, which consisted in making political activity ever more an economic

activity: The *demos* lived on the pay that it received for attending the Assembly and the law courts. But just as Dikaiopolis' private peace is not public peace, i.e., peace pure and simple, the sausage seller does not return to the country; the economic life is not possible without political life; the *demos* is not identical with the city (273-74, 811-12, 1005-10). The fundamental political predicament is disposed of in the *Knights* by the absorption of the individuals into the individual called Demos, as well as by the absence of women (and children). Aristophanes will experiment with the diametrically opposed solution in the *Assembly of Women*.